CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: AUBURN AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION TO GUIDELINES

The Conservation Guidelines outlined in this booklet are intended to assist property owners, architects, and contractors who are considering work within the Auburn Avenue Historic District, including changes to existing buildings, demolition, or new construction. The guidelines are not rigid sets of rules, but serve as a guide in making improvements which are compatible with the district's character. They set broad parameters within which district changes should occur, while maintaining ample opportunity for design creativity and individual choice. The guidelines give the owner and the City's Historic Conservation Board a way to determine whether the proposed work is appropriate to the long-term interests of the district.

When construction or demolition is proposed within the Historic District, a Certificate of Appropriateness (C.O.A.) must be obtained from the Historic Conservation Board (HCB). This is in addition to a building permit, although there is no additional fee. The following kinds of work do not require a C.O.A.:

- Ordinary repair and maintenance which does not result in an exterior change.
- Interior work such as plumbing, wiring, and plastering.

The following points are extremely important:

- The guidelines do not require that an owner make improvements.
- The guidelines do not force an owner to "take the property back to the way it was."
- The HCB may modify certain guidelines, as appropriate, in cases of economic hardship.
- The HCB must approve the proposal, even if it doesn't meet the guidelines, when the owner demonstrates:
    1. That there is no economically feasible and prudent alternative" which would conform to the guidelines, and
    2. That strict application of the guidelines would deny a reasonable rate of return on the property, and would amount to a "taking of the property without just compensation."
- The guidelines and the legislation which set up the HCB are structured for negotiating solutions which will give the owner substantial benefit without causing substantial harm to the district. The Board may grant approval, set conditions, or waive certain guidelines to aid negotiations.
- Any applicant who disagrees with a Board decision may appeal the decision to City Council.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the Historic Conservation Office staff during the planning stages prior to formal application for a building permit. We are available in Suite 700, Centennial Plaza Two, 805 Central Avenue or at 352-4890.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Mt. Auburn has long been a desirable community due to its excellent views and its proximity to downtown Cincinnati. As early as 1819, wealthy Cincinnatians moved to this hilltop area to enjoy its fresh air and to escape the crowding in the city below. They made Mt. Auburn one of Cincinnati's earliest and most beautiful suburban communities. About the year 1838, the old Mad River Road was relocated to the present location of Auburn Avenue. Although the new road was not, in itself, the start of a new era for Mt. Auburn, it marked the beginning of the community's period of suburban prosperity. During this period, Mt. Auburn was home to some of Cincinnati's most famous citizens, including Gorham Worth, Alphonso Taft, Henry Powell, Eugene Zimmerman, and William Doane. In 1867 the street railway connected the neighborhood to downtown, and in 1872 Cincinnati's first incline, the Main Street Inclined Railway, was constructed. The street railway and the incline opened the area to further development and brought with them many new residents. The area flourished during this period, as a growing number of private homes, apartment buildings, hotels, churches, and businesses were constructed. By 1900, Mt. Auburn was a well developed urban community, fully a part of the City of Cincinnati, much as we know it today.

The Auburn Avenue Historic District contains a mixture of building styles and dates of construction, reflecting Mt. Auburn's rich history. Victorian-era mansions stand next to more modest residences. Late nineteenth century rowhouses share the streets with early twentieth century apartment buildings. Imposing churches contrast with modern medical office buildings. Many private homes have been rehabilitated as offices. The district extends along most of Auburn Avenue, the spine of the community, and includes buildings on Wellington Place, East Hollister Street, East McMillan Street, and Wm. Howard Taft Road.

Although the Auburn Avenue Historic District contains an assortment of building styles, it holds together as a cohesive, identifiable unit. This is due to the similarity of its historic buildings in terms of materials, scale and form, height, detailing, and siting. These buildings are all constructed with natural materials: wood, stone, and brick. Most are two and three-story structures with openings scaled to match the building. The height, width and general proportions of the buildings tend to be similar. Most display distinctive architectural features such as a cornice or some other form of definition at the roof line, interior cornices, banding, quoins, window hoods, bay windows, and a distinctive detailing at the front door. Most are relatively large buildings set away from the street on equally large lots. Stone steps, stone walls, and wrought iron fences throughout the district add to its historic character. Walking through the district can give the viewer a real feeling of the late nineteenth century in one of Cincinnati's earliest "suburbs."

The oldest building in the district is the Greek Revival structure located at 2411 Auburn Avenue, which was constructed in 1839 as the residence of John C. Wright. Greek Revival structures are characterized by a simplicity in form and detail. They are likely to have a plain, rectangular "lintel" over the window and door, rather than the more elaborate hoodmold of later styles.

Other architectural styles commonly found in the district's historic buildings include Gothic Revival, Italian Villa, Italianate, Second Empire and Eclectic. The Gothic Revival style, as demonstrated by the Mt. Auburn Methodist Church constructed in 1851, is generally characterized by large pointed windows with tracery and steeply pitched roofs. The Italian Villa style can usually be recognized by a tower rising above the roof line and by the ornate detailing around the doorways and windows, as in the building at 2223 Auburn Avenue, which was constructed in 1859. Italianate structures are often rectangular, two or three-story buildings with wide eaves usually supported by large brackets and with rich ornamentation around their openings, as in the rowhouses located at 2356-2362 Auburn Avenue, constructed about 1873. The Second Empire style, as demonstrated by the buildings constructed in 1874 at 2210 and 2212 Auburn Avenue, is similar to the Italianate style but is further characterized by a mansard roof with protruding dormer windows. Late in the nineteenth century, buildings often were styled in an Eclectic manner, borrowing forms and ornamentation from earlier styles. The building at 2112 Auburn Avenue, which was built in 1890, is representative of Eclectic styling.

Not all buildings within the Auburn Avenue Historic District, however, contribute to the distinctive quality of the district. There are approximately twenty buildings which were constructed after the

majority of the buildings in the district and which possess a different architectural character. These "non-contributing" buildings vary widely in their scale, material, and detailing in comparison to one another and to the district's historic structures. The district's non-contributing buildings are treated separately in these conservation guidelines (See the Non-Contributing Buildings section of this booklet for specific guidelines).

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1) Avoid removing or altering historic material or distinctive architectural features: if it's original and in good shape, try to keep it.

2) Repair rather than replace whenever possible. If replacing, replicate the original based on existing materials. Do not invent something that "might have been."

3) When extensive replacement of missing or severely deteriorated materials is necessary and replication to exactly match the original is not feasible, the new work should match the general character of the original in terms of scale, texture, design and composition.

4) Don't try to make the building look older than it really is. Rehabilitation work should fit the character of the original building. If your building has been substantially altered, nearby buildings of similar age and style may indicate what its original character was.

5) Your building may contain clues to guide you during rehabilitation. Original detailing may be covered up with other, later materials, or there may be physical evidence of what original work was like and where it was located.

6) If no evidence of original materials or detailing exists, alterations should be detailed in a simple manner and contemporary in design, yet fit the character of the building.

7) A later addition to an old building or a non-original facade may have gained significance on its own. It may be significant as a good example of its style or as evidence of changing needs and tastes. Don't assume it's historically worthless just because it's not part of the original building.

8) Original openings should not be altered. Enlarging or reducing the size of an opening can dramatically change the character of the building.

9) Surface cleaning should be done by the gentlest means possible. Never sandblast or use other abrasive methods. Cleaning or paint removal may not be necessary at all.

10) Original building materials and architectural detailing should not be covered by other materials.

BUILDING REHABILITATION AND ALTERATION

1) MATERIALS: SHOULD MATCH THE ORIGINAL AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE

Most contributing buildings in the district are made of brick, often with stone or tin details. Missing or deteriorated materials should be replaced with recycled or new materials which match the original as closely as possible with regard to the following: type, color, style, shape, and texture of materials, composition, type of joint, size of units, placement and detailing. Imitation or synthetic materials, such as aluminum or vinyl siding, imitation brick or stone, or plastic, are generally inappropriate.

2) DOORS AND WINDOWS: KEEP THE "EYES" OF THE BUILDING OPEN

Possibly the most important features of any building are its openings: its doors and windows. The size and' location of openings are an essential part of the overall design and an important element in the architectural styling. Original openings should not be altered. Original doors and window sashes should be repaired rather than replaced, whenever possible. When replacement is necessary, the new door or window should match the original in size and style as closely as possible. Metal or plastic

window frames are generally unacceptable unless they are anodized or painted. Screens and storm windows should be as inconspicuous as possible. Raw metal combination storm windows or doors are not appropriate. Original openings should not be filled in,, especially on the front of buildings. If original openings are filled in, the outline of the opening should remain apparent by setting the new infill material back from the existing wall plane and by leaving the sills and lintels in place.

3) ROOF: MAINTAIN THE ROOFLINE

The existing roofline and architectural features which give the building its character, such as towers, roof shapes, dormers, cornices, brackets, and chimneys, should be preserved. The addition of features, such as vents, skylights, decks, and rooftop utilities, should be avoided or should be inconspicuously placed and screened where necessary. Slate roofs are common within the district and should be maintained whenever possible. On roofs visible from public areas, slate or asphalt shingles, colored to match the original, are acceptable replacement materials. Generally, wood shingles, roll roofing, built-up tar and gravel, plastic, or fiberglass roofing materials are inappropriate, although there may be exceptions to this rule. On flat or low-pitched roofs that are not visible from public areas, other roof materials may be considered.

4) ORNAMENTATION: RETAIN DISTINCTIVE DETAILING

Significant architectural features such as window hoods, stone and tin cornices and brackets, decorative piers, quoins, bay windows, door surrounds, and other ornamental elements should be preserved. These distinctive features help identify and distinguish the buildings within the Auburn Avenue Historic District.

5) EXTERIOR ACCESSORIES: AVOID OUT-OF-CHARACTER FEATURES

The addition of out-of-character features should be avoided. If shutters are appropriate, they should be the right size and should shut, meeting in the middle of the window and covering the whole window. Other outside attachments to the house, such as light fixtures, should be compatible. In general, the "colonial" light fixture should be avoided; something simple and modern is usually more appropriate. It is generally inappropriate to attach signs to buildings which were originally private homes, although small identification signs may be acceptable. (See the Site Improvements and Alterations section of this booklet for additional guidelines for signs.)

6) MECHANICAL SYSTEMS: PLACE THEM INCONSPICUOUSLY

The installation of utility and mechanical systems, such as water or gas meters, antennas, and central air conditioning units should be inconspicuously placed, avoiding installation on the street facade whenever possible. Antennas, including television reception antennas and satellite dishes, should be located where they are not visible on the front facade. Mechanical equipment on the ground should be screened with a fence or plant materials or housed in a structure that is in harmony with the surroundings. Mechanical equipment attached to the side or roof of a building should be kept as low as possible and covered or painted to blend with the background. Wall or window air conditioning units on the street facade should be avoided whenever possible.

7) CLEANING: NEVER SANDBLAST

The cleaning of existing material should be done by the gentlest method possible. For masonry structures, begin with scraping by hand or scrubbing with a bristle brush and mild detergent. Chemical cleaning is effective, but must be followed immediately by a neutralizing acid wash. If chemical cleaning is used, test cleaning’ patches should be carried out in inconspicuous places to ensure that appropriate results are obtained. In any case, sandblasting and other abrasive cleaning methods are not acceptable. Sand-blasting destroys the surface of the brick and stone and shortens the life of the building. Wire brushes can also damage the masonry surface, and their use is also not acceptable.

8) REPOINTING MASONRY: USE THE PROPER MORTAR AND JOINT

The mortar joints (spaces between the bricks) found in masonry construction deteriorate for a variety of reasons. Repointing these joints can significantly aid the rehabilitation of a structure. Generally, buildings built prior to 1900 used a lime-based mortar. This mortar is much softer than the portland cement-based mortar of today. If a hard, modern mortar is used, the softer bricks may crack or break during the freeze/thaw cycle. When repointing an existing wall, use a mortar mix that is high in lime content and try to match the color and consistency of the sand as closely as possible, and match the type and thickness of the joint. (The City's Historic Conservation Office can suggest a typical mortar mixture.)

9) WATER-REPELLENT COATINGS: AVOID IF POSSIBLE

Most historic structures have survived without the need of water-repellent coatings. Water-related damage on the interior of buildings is usually a result of a failing roof, deteriorated or faulty gutters and downspouts, deteriorated mortar, rising damp, or condensation. Water-repellent coatings will not solve these problems and may even accelerate them. Waterproof and water-repellent coatings should never be used unless there is actual water penetration through the masonry. In this case, only the affected area should be treated and only after it has thoroughly dried out.

10) PAINTING: IF IT WAS PAINTED, PAINT IT AGAIN

The majority of the brick buildings in the district (generally built prior to 1890) were faced with a relatively soft brick requiring paint for protection. Painted brick buildings should be repainted rather than stripped or cleaned to reveal the natural brick color. Paint color was also part of the overall design scheme. Although the HCB does not review paint colors, general recommendations do apply. Paint colors selected should be compatible with the district and appropriate for the style of the particular building. The color selected to paint the body of the building should contrast with the structure's decorative elements so that these architectural features stand out (Historic color charts are available at the City's Historic Conservation Office).

11) SIDING: TRY REPLACEMENT WITH WOOD FIRST

Wood clapboard siding should be used as the repair or replacement material where appropriate, and its use is encouraged as a resurfacing material on wood frame buildings. The use of aluminum or vinyl siding for resurfacing should be avoided; however, in cases where they are used, the exposed width of such siding should not exceed four inches. Artificial stone, asbestos, asphalt shingles, and other similar resurfacing materials should not be used. Architectural features such as cornices, brackets, window sills, and lintels should not be removed or obscured when resurfacing material is applied. All wood siding should be painted. Wood or aluminum siding should never be applied to brick or stone walls for resurfacing.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

The general aim of the guidelines for new construction is to encourage compatibility with (but not replication of) the character and quality found in the 19th and early 20th century buildings found in the district rather than compatibility with more recent structures identified as "non-contributing." The language of the guidelines, therefore, is keyed to the district's contributing buildings. Exceptions to this general rule may be found, however, where a new structure is proposed adjacent to other more recent structures. In these cases, review will also consider the new building's response to adjacent buildings. In all cases, the compatibility of the proposed structure with its natural and built environment will be considered in review, as will the following:

1) MATERIALS: USE NATURAL MATERIALS WHEN POSSIBLE

Materials should be of similar color, texture, and scale to building materials found in the district's contributing buildings. Most contributing buildings in the district are made of brick, often with stone details, although both stone and wood frame structures also exist. The use of natural appearing

materials is preferred. Materials that are synthetic in appearance or that are highly reflective are generally inappropriate.

2) SCALE AND MASSING: MATCH THE DISTRICT

The contributing buildings within the district are generally medium to large-sized residential and institutional structures situated on large lots. The scale and massing of a new building and its individual elements (i.e., windows, doors, roof, ornamentation) should be compatible. with the forms found among the contributing buildings. The ratio of wall surface to openings, and the ratio of width and height of windows and doors, should be consistent with the district's contributing buildings. Glass -curtain walls along the front facade should be avoided, and large, flat walls which are unbroken by openings or setbacks on the front facade also are discouraged.

3) HEIGHT: CONSIDER THE SURROUNDINGS

The height of new construction should not significantly differ from the height of nearby contributing buildings in the district. Generally, new buildings should not exceed the height of the tallest abutting building by more than one story. The contours of the building site may further restrict the height of the new building or may permit the construction of a larger building.

4) DETAILING: AVOID THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEATURELESS BOXES

The detailing of new buildings should respond to detailing found on contributing-buildings within the district. This should generally include the following:

- A cornice or other form of definition at the roof line.
- Distinctive detailing at the front door.
- Window sills and lintels and/or distinctive detailing at openings.
- Ornamental features such as banding, distinctive corner treatment, interior cornice and other decorative elements.
- When applicable, as in mixed-use buildings with storefronts, a base at the ground floor or lower levels, employing a change of material or change of color and proportions from upper floors.

5) SITING: STAY IN LINE WITH THE NEIGHBORING BUILDINGS

New structures should be sited with setbacks similar to those of adjacent buildings and should be sited to respect current topographic and neighborhood development patterns. Where applicable, they should be located to respect views and hillside constraints. Site improvements and changes should comply with the guidelines for site improvements and alterations. (Refer to the Site Improvements and Alterations section of this booklet for applicable guidelines.)

ADDITIONS

1) COMPATIBILITY: CONSIDER THE ADDITION AS NEW CONSTRUCTION

In general, additions should follow the guidelines for new construction in terms of materials, form, scale, height, detailing and siting. (See the New Construction section of this booklet for specific guidelines.)

2) DESIGN: RESPOND TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ORIGINAL BUILDING

The design of an addition should respond specifically to the architecture of the original building. While the addition should be sympathetic to and compatible with the existing building, it should not try to duplicate its style or appear to have been built at the same time as the original building. The design should also respond, in a more general way, to adjacent buildings.

3) IDENTITY: DO NOT OVERPOWER THE EXISTING BUILDING

If the original building is architecturally or historically, significant, the addition should take a respectful "back seat" to it and not overpower the original. An addition may be taller than the original building if site considerations and careful design still allow the older building to remain dominant.

4) CONNECTIONS: KEEP THEM SIMPLE

The connection of the addition to the original building should be designed so that it does not detract from either structure. Significant architectural features of the original building should not be destroyed, removed, or obscured by the addition.

DEMOLITIONS

The demolition of existing buildings shall not be permitted unless one of the following conditions exist:

1) Demolition has been ordered by the Director of Buildings and Inspections for public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition which constitutes an emergency.
2) The owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the structure cannot be reused nor can a reasonable economic return be gained from the use of all or part of the building proposed for demolition.

3) The owner is a non-profit corporation or organization and can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the denial of the application to demolish would also deny the owner the use of the property in a manner compatible with its organizational purposes and would amount to a taking of the owner s property without just compensation.

4) The demolition request is for an inappropriate addition or a non-significant portion of a building and the demolition will not adversely affect those parts of the building which are significant as determined by the HCB.

5) The demolition request is for a non-contributing building and the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the district.

SITE IMPROVEMENTS AND ALTERATIONS

1) SIGNS: AVOID CLUTTER

Generally, signs should be designed for clarity, legibility, and compatibility with structures on the site and in the district. Their design should be simple and contemporary. It is generally inappropriate to attach signs to buildings which were originally private homes, although small identification signs may be acceptable. Free-standing signs are permitted, but should not be sized or located in such a way as to obstruct views of the district’s contributing buildings. Billboards and roof-top signs are not permitted, and internally-illuminated signs are strongly discouraged. Wood, metal, and fabric signs are encouraged; plastic and other synthetic materials are inappropriate.

2) PARKING: LOTS SHOULD BE SCREENED AND LANDSCAPED

New parking lots along Auburn Avenue are discouraged. if new lots are necessary, they should be placed to the side or rear of buildings and should be as small as possible. Parking lots should relate well to the natural slopes and site contours, avoiding excessive cutting and filling. They should be sufficiently screened to minimize the view of parked cars. Screening can incorporate landscaping, decorative fencing, and berms and should be of a design compatible with the surrounding buildings and landscape elements. Lots with space for ten or more cars should be planted with shade trees in order to soften the visual impact of the lots on the neighborhood. In these cases, trees should be placed around the perimeter of the lots and in planting islands within the lots.

3) WALLS AND FENCES: RETAIN THE ORIGINAL

Stone retaining walls and wrought iron fences are distinctive characteristics of the Auburn Avenue Historic District. Existing historic walls, gates, and fences should be repaired and retained wherever possible. New fences should be of wood, iron, or stone and should be simple and contemporary in design. These should not exceed four (4) feet in height in the front yard, so that views of the contributing buildings within the district are not obstructed. Chain-link, concrete block, unfaced concrete, plastic, fiberglass, or plywood fences and walls are inappropriate. Solid (privacy) fences, including "stockade" fences, are discouraged, except where they are necessary for screening storage or small parking areas. New retaining walls should be of dry stone or stone masonry. In some instances, planted hedges may be more appropriate than new fences or walls.

4) LANDSCAPING: SIMPLE AND CONTEMPORARY

Landscaping, special lighting, seating, and decorative paving are encouraged as part of rehabilitation and new construction projects. The design of these features should be simple and contemporary. Antiques or historic reproductions are not generally encouraged. Mature trees should be retained, as should other significant features such as steps, retaining walls, walks, and fences which contribute to a property's character.

NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

Buildings which do not contribute to the distinctive character of the district were generally constructed after most of the rest of the district was built. They are of a different character than the contributing buildings due to their age and the difference in their scale, material, and detailing. The following buildings are in this category:

2000 Auburn Ave	2328 Auburn Ave
2009-2011 Auburn Ave	2340 Auburn Ave
2010 Auburn Ave	2350 Auburn Ave
2123 Auburn Ave	2438 Auburn Ave (church)
2020 Auburn Ave	2439 Auburn Ave (addition only)
2031 Auburn Ave	42 E Hollister
2058 Auburn Ave	47 E Hollister
2108 Auburn Ave	71 E Hollister
2230 Auburn Ave	103 William Howard Taft
2314 Auburn Ave	

Additions, alterations, and rehabilitation of the above buildings should either be compatible with the style and character of each or should cause the building to become more compatible with the district.

Non-contributing buildings may be demolished if the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the district; any new construction on the cleared site will be subject to the guidelines for new construction and site improvements for the Auburn Avenue Historic District.